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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that yesterday PM Ehud Olmert, DM Ehud Barak, and FM Tzipi Livni told U.S. Mideast envoy George Mitchell that Israel would respond to every Hamas violation of the cease-fire, be they rocket attacks, strikes along the border fence or smuggling through tunnels. The media reported that Mitchell told Israeli officials

that the new administration was committed to Israel's security, to the Roadmap, and to the 2004 letter by former President George Bush stating that Palestinian refugees would not return to Israel and that the border between Israel and the Palestinian Authority would take into consideration facts on the ground, meaning large settlement blocs would remain in Israeli hands. HaQaretz quoted a GOI source in Jerusalem as saying yesterday that it was understood during talks with Mitchell that President Barack Obama expects Israel and the PA to renew diplomatic talks right after elections here. The source was also quoted as saying that according to Mitchell, the U.S. administration is "very serious about the Palestinian issue" and wants to "accelerate the process" as much as possible. All media reported that Olmert told Mitchell that Gaza border crossings will not open permanently for the passage of goods unless a deal is reached on kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. Media quoted Damascus-based Hamas leader Khaled Mashal as saying that Gilad's release is only tied to the release of Palestinian prisoners. However, Olmert said Israel would continue opening the crossings for humanitarian aid.

Media reported that in a brief statement to the press, Mitchell said that consolidating the Gaza cease-fire was "of critical importance," and called for an end to the hostilities and smuggling and to open the crossings on the basis of the 2005 agreements. Olmert told Mitchell that the stability of the cease-fire in Gaza would be determined by two parameters: a complete cessation of Qassam rockets and attacks along the fence and an end to arms smuggling by Hamas. Media quoted President Shimon Peres, who also met with Mitchell, as saying that there was no contradiction between the positions of the U.S. and Israel. "Like the U.S., Israel wants peace," he was quoted as saying. "They say the administration will pressure Israel but we are actually the ones who will pressure the United States to assist us in bringing peace and fighting terror."

HaQaretz quoted Egyptian officials as saying they believe Hamas and Israel are close to an agreement on a temporary cease-fire of about 18 months. Egypt, which wants to be able to announce a new truce by February 5, has proposed that Israel and the Palestinians halt any military activity, and that Israel agree to a partial opening of the crossings. According to the Egyptian proposal Hamas will receive assurances that the crossings will open fully in the future to bring in all goods, including some, such as iron and concrete, that Israel had prohibited because of concern it would be used for terror activities. The Jerusalem Post reported that a delegation of Egyptian engineers has traveled to the American border with Mexico to learn techniques used by the U.S. military to detect and destroy tunnels.

The media reported that the first mortar shell to hit the Negev since Operation Cast Lead was fired last night at the Eshkol region, landing in an open area and causing no damage. Another rocket landed outside Sderot this morning. Electronic media reported that last night the IAF bombed arms smuggling tunnels and a Hamas weapons arsenal. The media quoted IAF Commander Maj. Gen. Ido Nehushtan as saying yesterday that he doubted the long-term efficacy of Israel's bombing of the tunnels on the Philadelphi Route in southern Gaza. In the first remarks on the outcome of Operation Cast Lead by a member of the IDF General Staff, Nehushtan said he recommended focusing on all means of weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Post reported that EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana hinted in an interview with the newspaper that he does not rule out talks with Hamas.

Yesterday Channel 2-TV quoted security officials as saying that a massive terror attack planned against an Israeli target in Europe was thwarted in recent weeks. Intelligence sharing between Israel and an undisclosed European country was credited with averting the plot, which was linked to Hizbullah. Israeli security officials expect attempts to hit Israeli targets abroad to intensify with the approach of the one-year anniversary of the February 14 assassination of Hizbullah's second-in-command, Imad Mughniyah.

FM and Kadima chair Tzipi Livni was quoted as saying in an interview with HaQaretz that she might join forces with Yisrael Beiteinu. Maariv reported that senior Kadima members are considering a campaign focused on a Kadima commitment to exclude Shas from a possible Livni-led government. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that

Kadima is planning for a defeat at the polls and that if the party gets less than 22 Knesset seats, Livni will fall. The Jerusalem Post reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu has accused Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman of being willing to divide Jerusalem. However, Likud says there will be no bloody battle with Yisrael Beiteinu.

HaQaretz reported that intelligence organizations in Israel will examine claims of careless use of classified information during the fighting in the Gaza Strip, carelessness that supposedly led to the loss of intelligence assets.

Maariv reported former IDF chief of staff Amnon Lipkin Shahak, former Shin Bet director Yaakov Perry, and Maj. Gen. (res.) Danny Rothschild are calling on Israelis to adopt the Saudi peace initiative.

Leading media reported that yesterday the Foreign Ministry announced that it had ordered the Venezuelan ambassador to leave the country this week. HaQaretz quoted Venezuela's government as saying that it was proud that Israel has expelled its diplomatic envoys, calling Israel's leaders criminals while denying allegations of anti-Semitism at home.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Rebecca Caspi, senior VP and director general of operations of UJC (United Jewish Communities)-Israel, as saying that U.S. Jews expect Israel to accept more financial responsibility for its needs. Caspi says that due to the economic crisis, Israel no longer was at the forefront of American Jews attention.

HaQaretz reported that U.S. professors are copying their British counterparts, attempting to shut Israeli academics out of campus. In the wake of Operation Cast Lead, a group of American university professors has for the first time launched a national campaign calling for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday the Israel Aerospace Industries board approved initial investment up to \$50 million in a joint venture with Tata Advanced Systems, a subsidiary of the Indian conglomerate, Tata. The two firms plan to invest up to \$1 billion in defense-linked ventures.

Channel 2-TV and HaQaretz published the results of a Dialog poll conducted on January 27-28. For the first time Yisrael Beiteinu overtakes the Labor Party; the right-wing bloc has grown to 65 Knesset seats while the left bloc has dwindled to 53:
How will you vote?Q (1/13 poll results in brackets): Likud 28 (29); Kadima: 25 (25); Yisrael Beiteinu: 15 (12); Labor Party: 14 (16); Shas: 10 (9); Meretz: 5 (7); Arab parties: 9 (10); United Torah Judaism: 5 (6); National-Religious Party-Jewish Home 3 (3); National Union 4 (3).

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: Basically, Olmert has put all the cards on the table. All the understandings, the promises and the achievements in the negotiations held with the Palestinians are now also known to the new U.S. administration.

Columnist Yoaz Hendel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: As Israel stops wars without guaranteeing that they won't resume in two years, American support will turn into a question mark.

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: In the big pictureQ promised by Obama, Israel will remain smaller than it is used to view itself.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: As he determines that they, together with Hizbullah, are incorrigible, he must inevitably conclude that Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah -- like al-Qaida -- need to be defeated.

Washington correspondent Hilary Leila Krieger wrote in The Jerusalem Post: If Obama can gain Arab support without compromising any of

Israel's core interests, [Israeli officials] can say, QHowdy pardner!

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in Yediot Aharonot (1/29): QAfter Al-Jazeera fed its audience around the clock, day after day, with horrifying pictures of children who were hurt in Gaza the accusing finger is now pointed in another direction: You, Hamas are responsible for the destruction and the casualties. Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz: QThe real reason many Israelis will vote for the right in 2009 is their deep disappointment with the center -- the center's leadership, party and cynicism.

Block Quotes:

I. QOlmert's Legacy

Diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/29): QA moment before leaving the Prime Minister's Office, Ehud Olmert is shackling the person who comes after him: in a meeting with special envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell yesterday, he revealed the details of the negotiations he conducted with the Palestinians on the outline for the permanent status arrangement.... Olmert presented the envoy of President Barack Obama with his and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's commitments to the Palestinians in their talks on the final status arrangement. QSixty thousand settlers out of the quarter million living in the territories will have to leave their place of residence,Q the Prime Minister told Mitchell about the understandings reached, Qand return to the Green Line in the framework of the permanent status arrangement with the PalestiniansQ.... Basically, Olmert has put all the cards on the table. All the understandings, the promises and the achievements in the negotiations held with the Palestinians are now also known to the new U.S. administration. Political officials believe that Olmert is Qin practice, binding the next governmentQ and committing all the candidates for prime minister to respond to the Obama administration on this detailed plan for an arrangement with the Palestinians. It particularly commits the Kadima candidate, Tzipi Livni: she was a full partner to the negotiations with Abu Mazen and the understandings reached also commit her. The American envoy was very cautious about making binding statements and stressed that he was in the region this time to listen and not to give opinions. However, Mitchell added that the Obama administration stands behind the commitment that President Bush gave in 2004 to Ariel Sharon whereby the U.S. would support an Israeli demand to annex settlement blocs in the framework of a future arrangement with the Palestinians. The Prime Minister also reported to Mitchell on the details of the indirect talks held last year with top Syrian officials in Turkey. In his estimate, in return for a peace agreement with Damascus, Israel would have to withdraw from the Golan Heights, and no other formula would be acceptable to the Syrians.

II. QIgnoring the Lessons of the Past

Columnist Yoaz Hendel wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (1/29): QThe current reason for [IsraelQs] abandoning the principles of the unilateral cease-fire is George MitchellQs visit. The government doesnQt want to drag the region into another war as the cop on duty is arriving. However, a renewed review of history will show that the U.S. has never stopped IsraelQs military responses. During the [Second] Lebanon War and the war in Gaza, the U.S. preserved Israeli interests on the international scene. It supported [Israel] because it recognized the justness of its course regardless of the price. But as Israel is unsure of itself, as Israel is the party that is giving up the principles that it set; as Israel stops wars without guaranteeing that they wonQt resume in two years, AmericaQs support will turn into a question mark.

III. QA Warrantless Declaration of Friendship

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/29): QDuring the election campaign, Barack Obama preferred to play down his Muslim father. In [this weekQs] interview with Al-Arabiya, he used this as a confidence-building

asset. QI have Muslim relatives; I lived in Muslim countries,Q he said, referring to the years he spent with his mother in Indonesia, his stepfather's land of origin. Those who wonder what this means for Israel, even before the Right shouts QWe told you so,Q should remember the constraints facing the new American President. Beyond the credit he earned thanks to the hope and symbolism inherent in his election, the unchanged tools for managing the United States global policy are at his disposal. Senior administration officials favor the use of the term Qsmart power,Q but America's adversaries know as well as it does that the two wars [in Iraq and Afghanistan] impoverish and exhaust the superpower and that a significant new operation is almost impossible at this time. This is eroding America's deterrence. The condition of the QcarrotsQ isn't much better. It can be assumed that without the fat checks that come with declarations of friendship, fewer countries will be willing to please America. In order to lastingly preserve the momentum of goodwill that the world gave him, Obama will have to endeavor to please key regions, at least on the rhetorical level. If Israel agrees to this approach, it will mostly have to keep quiet and let him do the work, hoping it will be able to reap the fruits of the restoration of America's reputation in the region. In the Qbig pictureQ promised by Obama, Israel will remain smaller than it is used to view itself.

IV. QObama's Islamist Challenge

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/29): QCan the new president undermine global jihad by reaching out directly to Muslim believers? It's worth a try, so we applaud his decision to give his first interview as president, on January 26, to the Al-Arabiya TV station. Regrettably, in Muslim civilization the leadership choice is not between authentic secularists and religious fanatics, but between violent and non-violent Islamists. So the best Obama can hope to do is help unlink Islam from brutality and drive a wedge between the two Islamist camps. Both, lamentably, favor Shari'a law as a way of life. But QgoodQ Islamists, for instance in Turkey, Iraq, Morocco and Egypt, operate peacefully. Their "fundamentalism liteQ is something the West can, at least theoretically, abide. Yet for such an QunlinkingQ approach to work, Obama must stick to his principles and show zero tolerance for organizations that Qkill innocent civilians.Q He might permit talks with Iran; he might allow discreet inquiries into Hamas's policies. But ultimately, as he determines that [Iran and Hamas], together with Hizbullah, are incorrigible, he must inevitably conclude that Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah -- like al-Qaida -- need to be defeated.

V. QA Kinder, Gentler Sheriff

Washington correspondent Hilary Leila Krieger wrote in The Jerusalem Post (1/29): QObama has already made some inroads with his overtures in a region that prizes symbolism. While Bush might have been the first U.S. president to enshrine a Palestinian state in America's foreign policy program, he got little credit for it because the Arab world hadn't believed he meant what he said. QPeople did not take Bush seriously, because they took what he said in a different light,Q Gaith Al-Omari, advocacy director for the Washington-based American Task Force on Palestine said. And, he continued, there was now a climate that made it easier for America's allies in the Arab world to work with the U.S. without being seen as betraying their people or values. All of which works well from the Israeli perspective, where officials don't care much about the gestures America makes as long as its bedrock support for Israeli security needs stays intact. In fact, if Obama can gain Arab support without compromising any of Israel's core interests, they can say, "Howdy pardner!"

VI. QQYou haven't Won, Palestinian Brothers

Arab affairs correspondent Smadar Perry wrote in Yediot Aharonot (1/29): QAfter Al-Jazeera fed its audience around the clock, day after day, with horrifying pictures of children who were hurt in Gaza and of thousand of new homeless, the accusing finger is now pointed in another direction: You, Hamas and the rejectionist organizations, not only have you not brought divine victory, but you are responsible for the destruction and the casualties; history will judge you; your government and your social institutions are destroyed; the members of your young generation are trampled,

becoming drug addicts, and inclined to death worship and suicide.

VII. QThe Center that Disappointed

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in Ha'aretz (1/29): QThe right's victory in the 2009 election is unavoidable. Unless an all-out war breaks out next week and a surprise peace agreement is signed, Benjamin Netanyahu will be the next prime minister. After three years of a center-left government, a center-right government will come to power. The unlikely scenario is a Likud-Shas-Yisrael Beiteinu government, while the likely scenario is a Likud-Labor-Kadima one. Either way the agenda of dividing the country will give way to an agenda of national security.... At its core, the Israeli majority is what it was before: realistic and pragmatic. It recognizes that the occupation is futile, but is looking for a safe way to end it. It recognizes that the Greater Israel vision is finished, but fears having a Hamas state on the outskirts of [the central Israel city of] Kfar Sava.... The real reason many Israelis will vote for the right in 2009 is their deep disappointment with the center -- the center's leadership, party and cynicism. Disappointment with the fact that the center did not turn its moderate-hard approach into a comprehensive worldview from which it derives a clear policy.... It is too late to change the results of February 10. But it is important to realize that they will be the center's loss more than the right's victory. The center will lose not because it is the center, but because it stopped being the center. The center will lose because it did not keep its promise to be a third way.

CUNNINGHAM